

Part II:

THE WAY BACK TO BOOTH

BY ZAC BURTT & JANE HARKNESS

AFTER INVESTIGATING THE DESOLATE SITE OF A FORMER LOGGING TOWN AND COMING UP DRY, WE TRACKED DOWN FORMER RESIDENTS IN THE HOPES OF FINDING ANOTHER WAY IN.

After uncovering the story of Booth, Oregon, my obsession with this long-lost town wouldn't let up. On my first visit to the townsite, I found no trace of its existence. But upon closer inspection during a later excursion, the tell-tale signs began to reveal themselves: hidden logging roads, holes in the forest floor where buildings once stood, non-native plants surely sowed by former residents. It felt like Booth was slowly beginning to materialize, but I wanted to dig deeper.

In its earliest days, Booth was nothing more than a whistle-stop along the Southern Pacific Railroad, but in a matter of months, over 200 people settled down in this little corner of the Siuslaw Forest, and the remote community grew into a bustling prosperous town. What was it like to live this transitory life? I couldn't turn back the clock and see the town as it was, but I could still find a way back to Booth by tracking down its residents and telling their stories.

top: Booth as seen today—remnants of old logging roads are some of the only evidence left. **facing page:** Booth shown in its hey day in the 1930s.

ARTHUR G. MAGNUSON & WILLIAM GORDON MURDOCK

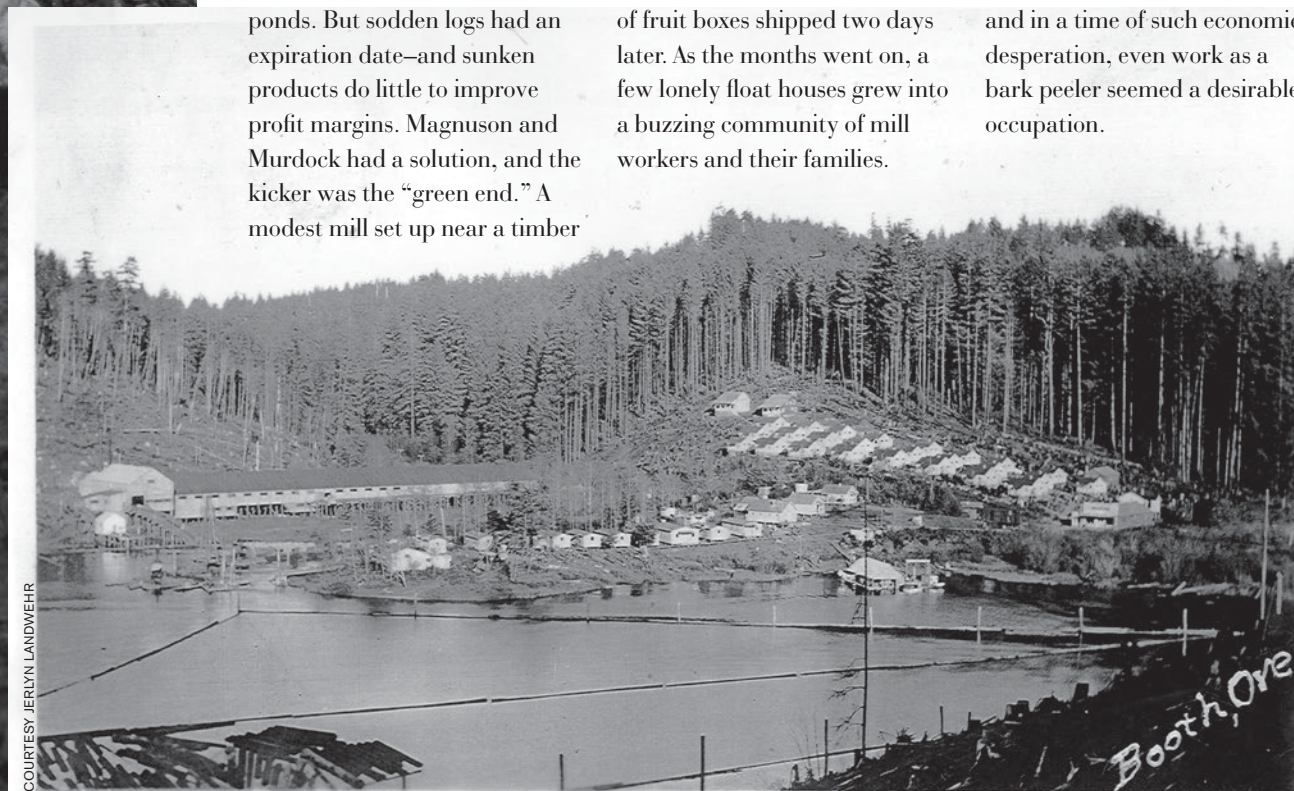
Arthur Magnuson and Gordon Murdock were the men behind Booth. In 1917, they co-founded the Keystone Shingle Mill in Raymond, Washington. At the time, over 90% of the red cedar shingles in the nation came out of Washington. But with no uniform grade standard or inspection certification services, the shingle industry was on shaky ground. Meanwhile, peeled-wood products were gaining traction as the superior material in the industry. This may have inspired their next business venture, which would involve tapping the peeling potential of yet another native Pacific Northwest species: Sitka Spruce. And in 1926, their plan took them south to Tillamook.

In the logging industry, storing log stock was a challenge. Most logs were transported and held via waterways and in logging ponds. But sodden logs had an expiration date—and sunken products do little to improve profit margins. Magnuson and Murdock had a solution, and the kicker was the “green end.” A modest mill set up near a timber

stand could fall logs as needed, and once supply was exhausted, the company could relocate to a fresh timber site—with all of this accomplished at a fraction of the cost of running a plywood mill. So in 1926, Magnuson and Murdock's new venture, Tillamook Spruce Veneer, cut a deal with the city: they would furnish a mill site, and TSV would make peeled-spruce veneer fruit boxes. At the conclusion of their contract, they would reimburse the city. After eight years of successful operation and reconciling their debts, it was time to move on. In the midst of the Great Depression, they loaded the mill and half of their employees onto train cars, and headed for the greener forests on the southeast edge of Siltcoos Lake. Booth site preparations began in October of 1932, the first whistle sounded September 25, 1933, and the first carload of fruit boxes shipped two days later. As the months went on, a few lonely float houses grew into a buzzing community of mill workers and their families.

Because of its remote location, Magnuson and Murdock had to build the town itself, constructing everything from the homes to the schoolhouse, general store, and even a post office. Some viewed company towns as exploitative, but in Oregon, these planned communities brought opportunities to workers in remote areas during the Depression. Much like other company towns that sprung up during this period, Booth was never intended to be a permanent community.

Life in Booth was tied to the mill's operation. It ran twenty-four hours a day, six days a week, with shifts starting at all hours. During the Depression, people were grateful for the work, and would go to lengths we can't fathom today to secure steady employment. There were plenty of people lining up to take on the backbreaking jobs—and in a time of such economic desperation, even work as a bark peeler seemed a desirable occupation.



COURTESY, JERYN LANDWEHR



1943

PHOTOS COURTESY SIUSLAW PIONEER MUSEUM

BOB JACKSON



Bob Jackson and wife Peggy in 1943.

Bob Jackson worked arguably the toughest job at the mill, and his way back to Booth each day was no walk in the park, either. He didn't need an alarm. The droning sounds of the mill roused him from his rest just before midnight. With hours until sunrise, he outfitted himself for his grueling shift, gulped down coffee, and headed for his boat. The moonlight on the water was all that illuminated his journey across the lake. Jackson, a bark peeler by trade, could smell the freshly chipped bark off the sodden logs well before he arrived at the mill. The same scent clung to his clothes, steeping him in the tang of the mill. He lived it and breathed it. But now, as he muscled his boat across the water, joints still aching from the day before, he savored the solitude, drawing his last breaths of fresh air before the stifling shift ahead.

Once Jackson arrived at the mill, more arduous tasks awaited. He and another worker spent their shifts hoisting sodden logs straight out of Siltcoos Lake

and chipping off the bark, one chunk at a time. In his writings, Jackson laments:

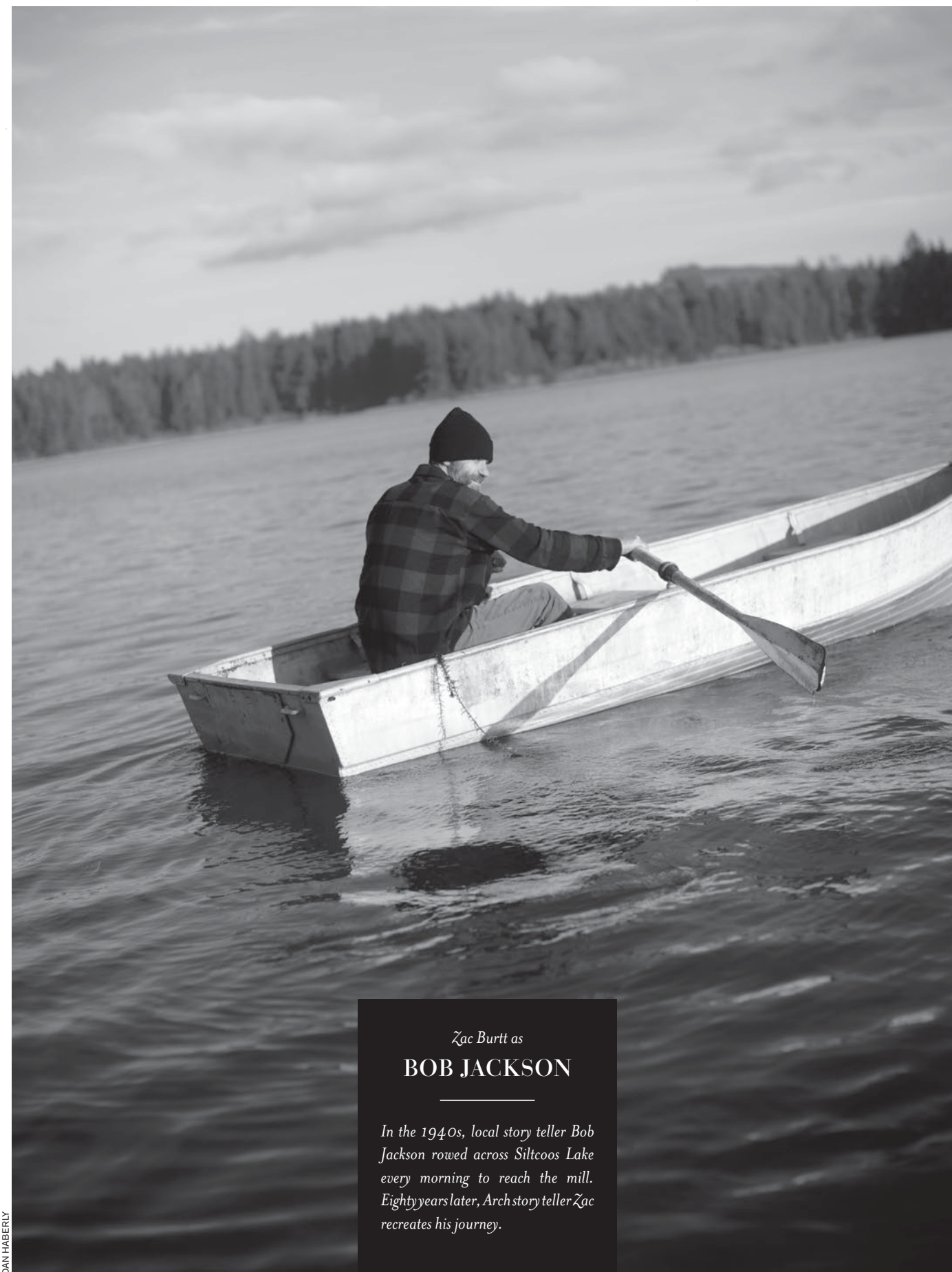
"You entered the mill on a ramp alongside the gaping doors where the railroad boxcars were loaded. Once inside the air was thick with the odor of towering stacks of baled, kiln-dried spruce slats...Inside the kiln area the heat and humidity was almost unbearable...Everywhere

the frantic pace was evident... The misery of the bark peelers was compounded by the great clouds of ravenous 'no-see-ums,' tiny mosquitoes which seemed to breed in the sodden bark piles and got into eyelashes, ears and noses...There were no breaks."

Thankfully, the smell of ink, oil, sweat, and burning wood couldn't rival the aromas waft-

ing from the cookhouse. Jackson and the other workers savored the scents as the cookhouse staff prepped the hot meals, always looking forward to eating during rare breaks—it kept them going throughout the day.

Jackson remembers his time in Booth with fondness and nostalgia, and he'd gladly tell anyone who'd listen about his cherished memories of the old Booth days. Many years after Booth was abandoned, he wrote the book *Hell's Hole and Battle Beach*, in which he reflected on his time at the box factory while exploring his personal history of the area. Jackson gave interviews with local media, became a columnist for *Siuslaw News*, and never stopped recounting his rough and tumble times on the east side of Siltcoos. And lucky for us, his stories endured long after the disappearance of the town itself, chronicling our local history. As Jackson's work would remind us, the mill workers weren't the only ones who built this town—there were plenty of other jobs to be done.



DAN HABERLY

Zac Burt as BOB JACKSON

In the 1940s, local story teller Bob Jackson rowed across Siltcoos Lake every morning to reach the mill. Eighty years later, Arch story teller Zac recreates his journey.

JEAN & RAY HARRIS

Jean Harris wasn't heading to a shift at the mill. But in the spring of 1940, her way back to Booth was just as arduous as Jackson's. While the adults in town were working hard at the mill, teenagers like Jean earned a living babysitting and taking care of other domestic duties for busy families.

In the cold of winter, 18-year-old Jean started through the forest before daybreak Monday mornings, with only her flashlight to guide her. Despite the darkness and potential encounters with local wildlife, Harris had no fear—like everyone else in the area, she was no stranger to walking long distances to get where she needed to go. Without cars and money for gas, or even reliable roads, it was the only option. The well-worn trail took her through steep and swampy areas. In the warmer months, the thick foliage provided shade from the heat of the sun. Her path was lined by towering old growth fir, spruce, and hemlock trees—walking through forests untouched by the timber industry was a very different experience than hiking in our 2nd, 3rd, or even 4th growth forests in the area today. The mammoth trees shaded out opportunistic undergrowth, minimizing brush and presenting a clearer path. Despite the distance, it was a pleasant *walk*.

During the week, Jean boarded at Mickey Camp's, the newly divorced mother of 6-year-old Bobby Camp. In their one-bedroom house, she watched Bobby, did laundry, cooked, and took care of other household duties for \$12 per month plus room and board. She slept on a cot in

the washroom, sharing her space with the washer, dryer, and water heater. Considering how many were struggling to make ends meet, she felt rich. Soon, the Squires sought her out, and offered \$15 per month to watch their son Kenny. Then the Grangers hired Jean to care for their newborn daughter Loretta. She was now making a grand total of \$42 a month. Overall, she made almost half of what a mill worker was making, along with free room and board. After working a half day Saturday, she set out for the return trip home. The short weekend was a welcome respite after parenting half the kids in town.

Jean's husband, Ray was perhaps the most steadfast and determined in his way back to Booth—and for a while, there was not even a guarantee that a job would be waiting for him at the other end. His family lived in the same Five Mile Valley as Jean's, and his parents had a small dairy farm about three miles from Jean's family home. After turning 18, Ray made the three mile walk from his parents farm over the hill to Booth, sporadically at first, but after being turned away each time, he endeavored to make more frequent appearances. He began showing up every day to increase his chances of getting a job at the mill.

To any mill worker in Booth, the foreman was always watching. To a man looking for a job, he was always "gonna be right back." In his writings, Jackson described how the foreman could make or break a man's livelihood:

"It was a cat and mouse game

that he never seemed to tire of... if the obviously desperate job seeker missed one day and there just happened to be a job opening that morning, then whoever was standing there got the job. Even if it happened to be his first trip to the mill."

After about a month, the foreman took pity on Ray and hired him. Jean recalls her employer Mickey Camp's retelling of the story: "The foreman said, I've just got to give that kid a job because I don't have the heart to turn him away one more time." Ray worked the night shift for several months before a day shift opened up. For a time, the couple would meet at Five Mile School, a half mile from Jean's home, and continue their three mile walk through the woods back to Booth together.

Ray endured all of the challenges of working at the mill for fifty cents an hour—until he married Jean, that is. At the mill, marriage earned you a five cent an hour raise. She used to tease him that this might have been the only reason he married her, but clearly, this was just a running joke. The happy couple spent 56 memorable years together until Ray passed. Jean is still happily telling stories of Booth at the young age of 98, and she would tell you that those were the good old days.

Mill workers and loggers weren't the only ones making the daily trip to Booth. School children from all over the Siltcoos Lake area and the dairy farms that filled every valley of every creek joined the kids that lived in Booth at a brand new school built by Arthur Magnuson, the owner of the box mill.



clockwise from top: Jean (left) and Ray (right); Jean age 98 at home up Smith River; Jean and Ray on their wedding day, February 15, 1941; Jean age 16.



Geraldine & Shawn Prociw as

JEAN & RAY HARRIS

Geraldine and Shawn trace Jean and Ray's path through the Siltcoos area forest, passing centuries-old trees that still stand. Few remain from the old Booth days.

ELSIE MILES

Jean Harris lovingly refers to Elsie Miles as her foster daughter. Their homes were three miles apart and in those days, that meant you were neighbors. Jean watched Elsie grow up. And later, when Elsie attended highschool in Gardiner, she would board with Jean and Ray Harris to be nearer to the school.

Between the ages of six and ten, Elsie attended school in Booth. To get back to Booth, she inched her way down a narrow walkway that her father had built through the marsh near her family's dairy farm. Whether it was a rainy morning or a cloudy evening, Elsie made the same slippery commute. The walkway measured two by twelve inches with no railings, so it took quite a bit of effort to calm her nerves, fight the queasy feeling in her stomach, and steady her balance to avoid falling into the drink.

The first few times that Elsie headed off the school in the morning, she ended up crawling down the pathway for fear that she would slip right off the edge. Her father patiently taught her how to walk across safely—she just had to keep her eyes a couple of feet ahead of each step and avoid looking down at the marsh below.

To the sounds of meadow-larks, she would set off for school each morning. At the end of this precarious walkway, she waited for the school boat. Over the years, different men hailing from all around Siltcoos Lake held the contract for the school boat. The boat took them on a four and a half mile journey to Booth, and the scenery along the lakeshore changed with the seasons. As the temperatures

dropped come fall, the trees and shrubbery along the lake exploded in autumn colors. On stormy days, turbulent waters rocked the boat as they made their way to the docks. To pass the time during the journey, the children tore pages from old Sears and Roebuck catalogs, folding them into paper boats and planes, which they launched into the lake. Sometimes, they would find them still afloat on the afternoon trip home.

When they unloaded at Booth, children were given specific instructions to stay on the wooden walkway leading to school—it was all too easy for the little ones to take a tumble if they stepped off of it.

During the school day, the children were taught by Miss Alice Becker from first through fourth grade, while Mrs. Minnie Law taught fifth through eighth grade. The women began working at the school when it opened as families began arriving in Booth and stayed until it closed in 1943. At its peak, school enrollment reached 30. The two main rooms were joined by a breezeway, which contained a small play area and two restrooms. A large gymnasium stood on stilts a few yards across the playground, where students could play on the swings and seesaw. Children used the space underneath the gym for games like hide and seek and cops and robbers, while community events like plays and musicals were hosted above. Dancing around the May Pole was a colorful and beloved tradition.

While some women in Booth taught school or provided child-care, others actually worked at the mill.



PHOTOS COURTESY SIUSLAW PIONEER MUSEUM



top: 1944 Booth class photo, back row: Margaret Crowder, Elsie Miles, Marna Vaughn 2nd row: Ramona Gandy, Bobby Camp, Billy Smith, Vernon Sanders, Dick Sanders, Corky Stevens Front row: Helen Vaughn, Dora Mae Crowder, Phillis ?, Marilyn ?, Eddie Savage, Buddy Miles **center:** Elsie Miles age 11, at Ada Station in 1942. **bottom:** Booth newspaper drive for WWII in 1943.

Ezra Haberly as

ELSIE MILES

Like Elsie Miles on her walks to the school boat in the 1930s, Ezra balances on a two by twelve inch walkway, carefully making her way through the marsh of this former dairy farm.



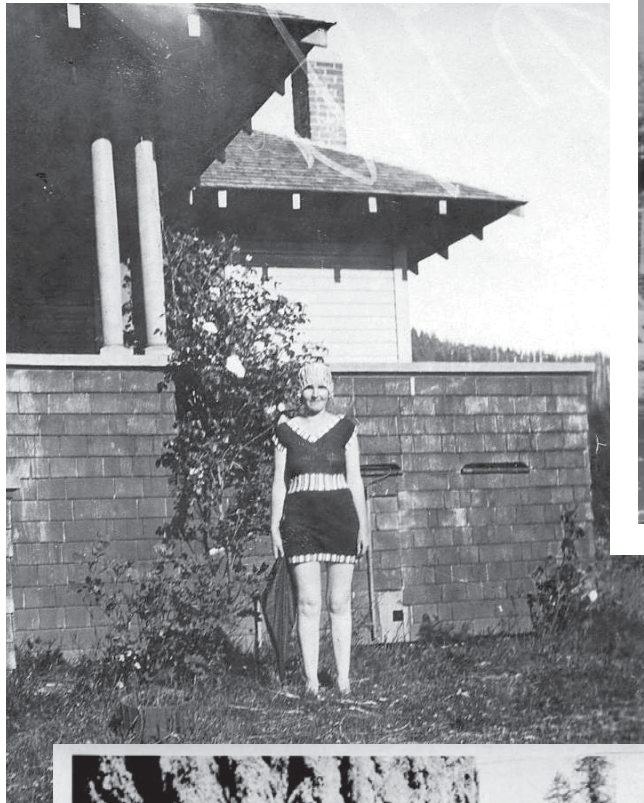
DAN HABERLY

CLIFF & LORRAINE WORTHYLAKE

Elsie's sister, Lorraine Worthylake, built her first home in Booth along with her newlywed husband, Cliff. Their float house, held up by stilts on the lake, was located right along the walkway where the school boat docked. Cliff was a logger contracted by Crown Zellerbach for \$4 per day, and along with Elsie's father Dan Miles, he helped fall the timber that would become the Booth townsite. Lorraine's first job was in the mill. To get to work at the box factory, Lorraine walked across the logs floating in Siltcoos Lake, often rolling, slippery, and wet from the rainy weather, but by some miracle she never fell in. On really rainy days, she would walk down the railroad tracks to get to the mill.

Women held the sorting jobs in the mill, sorting the slats as they came down the conveyor belt. As the hours wore on, they fell into a rhythm, keeping up with the pace of the machines. If they were lucky, the conveyor would jam and they could rest, for just a short time until it was up and running again. Otherwise, as usual, there were no breaks. After Lorraine's first day of work, she was so tired that she sat down on the factory steps and cried—but day after day, she carried on, head up, steadily traversing the logs in the holding area to put her time in.

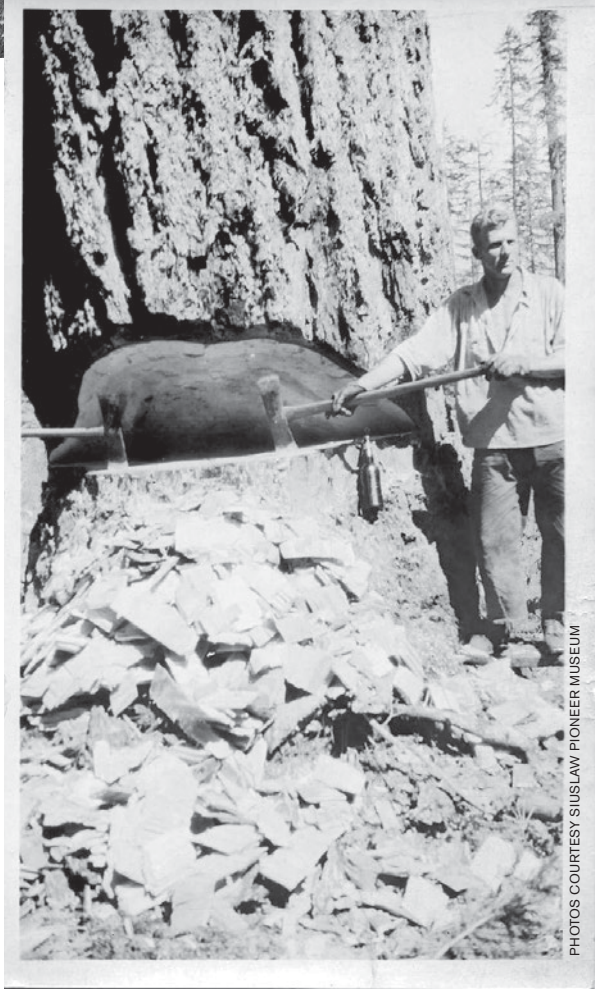
Working in the mill certainly wasn't for the faint of heart, but the former mill workers look back at their time there with a sense of grit and pride. At a time when so many Americans couldn't find work, the men and women of Booth were able to make a living. With everyone working toward a common



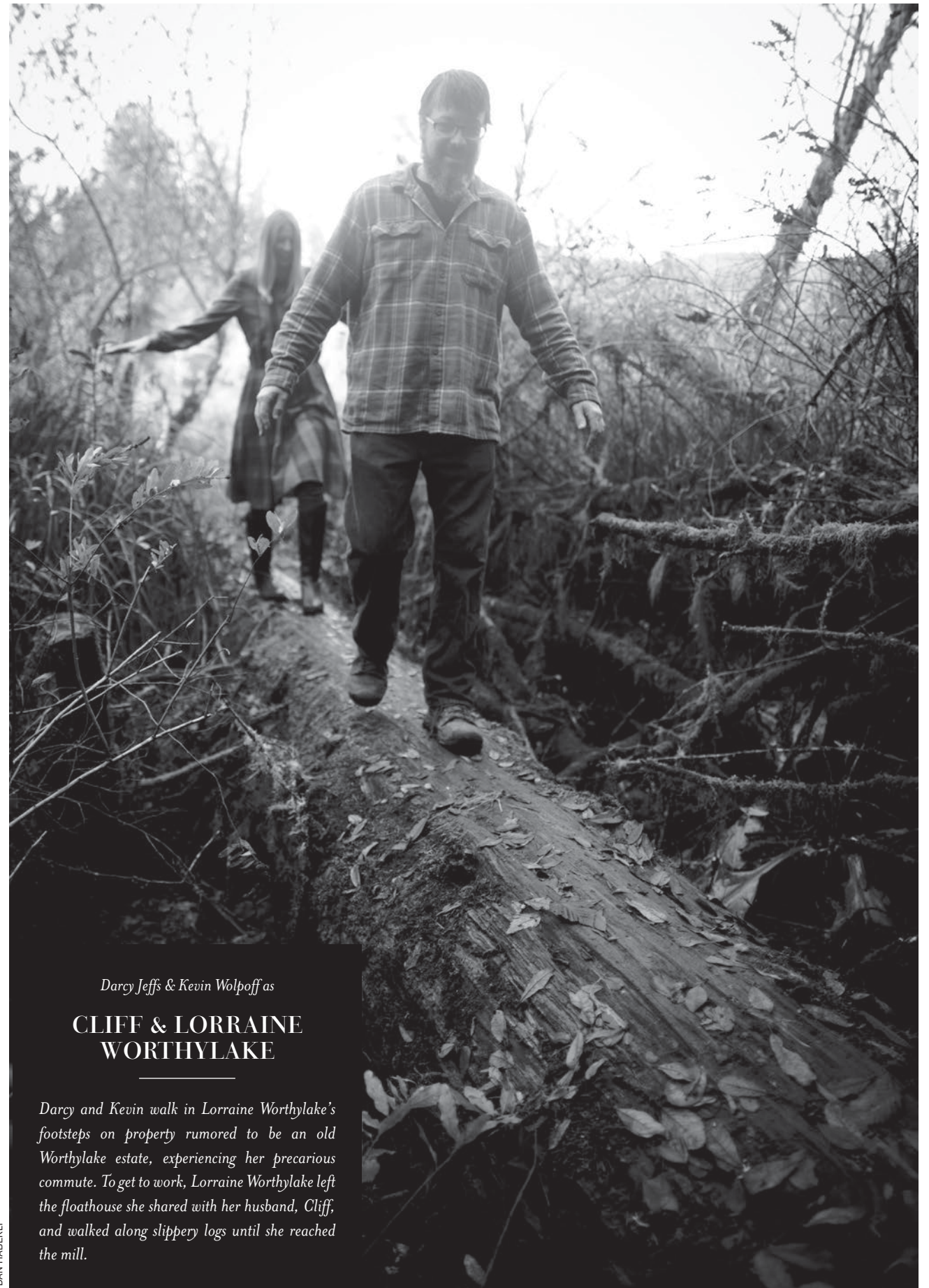
clockwise: Lorraine Worthylake; Cliff and Lorraine Worthylake's first home, a float house built at Booth, dated 1933; early old growth logging, Cliff Worthylake.

purpose, they cultivated a sense of unity that many of us wish we enjoyed with our neighbors today.

To refer to Booth as a “ghost town” is a bit of a stretch. Almost nothing remains of the former mill town—no crumbling houses, no abandoned factories, no boarded shops or empty schoolhouses. Much like the residents once found their way to Booth, we sought to find our own way back today, exploring those same roads, rails, forests, and waterways that Booth residents once called home. But that can only take us so far. It is the stories of those who had come this way over eighty years ago that paved the way back to Booth. Through their memories, we can hear the echoes of the past, and by keeping these stories alive, we can still visit that old mill town, if only for a little while.  *Continued from our previous issue.*



PHOTOS COURTESY SIUSLAW PIONEER MUSEUM



Darcy Jeffs & Kevin Wolpoff as

CLIFF & LORRAINE WORTHYLAKE

Darcy and Kevin walk in Lorraine Worthylake's footsteps on property rumored to be an old Worthylake estate, experiencing her precarious commute. To get to work, Lorraine Worthylake left the floathouse she shared with her husband, Cliff, and walked along slippery logs until she reached the mill.

DAN HABERLY